

Jim Casella

Dystopia

for percussion ensemble



Dystopia by Jim Casella
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Program Notes

Dystopia was written in 2008 for the Lanier Middle School percussion ensemble from Buford, Georgia under the direction of Hunter McRae. Around the time we were coming up with the concept of what to do with this piece, I had been doing some film scoring work for low budget horror films. So the crew at Lanier came up with the idea to try capturing a similar sense of tension, action, and suspense these films exhibit, but in a performance piece written specifically for percussion instruments. Part of this endeavor happened naturally while other aspects require a certain sense of creativity to truly capture. Some interesting textures are achieved by way of the bowed waterphone, tam tam, and vibraphones, and the guttural, groaning bass drum achieved by creating friction using a rubber ball drug against the large drumhead. Frequent use of tight intervals and dissonant melodies add to the tension driven by a syncopated ostinato in 5/4.

This type of music isn't conventional in its melodic or harmonic functions, but rather it's built to create an audible landscape intended to manipulate emotions. It should get under the listener's skin. Essentially, this is program music designed to take listeners on a journey of their own images. There isn't a literal story being told here, but its structure takes us from quiet mystery to suspenseful pursuit, then action-based escape. These dramatic elements should allow each performer or listener to choose his or her own adventure and have a little fun letting the music create a scary story line of their own.

Dystopia premiered at the 2008 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago, Illinois where it received an enthusiastic response.

-Jim Casella

List of players and instruments

Player 1

glockenspiel, xylophone, temple blocks

Player 2

vibraphone (with mallets and bow)

Player 3

vibraphone (with mallets and bow)

Player 4

marimba (low A)

Player 5

marimba (low A)

Player 6

standard set of 4 timpani

Player 7

piano

Player 8

bowed waterphone (or other screechy bowed device like music stand, gong, or cymbal), chimes (with regular mallet and xylo mallets)

Player 9

suspended cymbal, triangle, 2 cowbells, finger cymbal

Player 10

military drum

Player 11

snare drum, suspended cymbal

Player 12

tam tam (with stick, bow, and triangle beater)

Player 13 - 4 concert toms, sizzle cymbal

Player 14 - crash cymbals

Player 15 - bass drum (with mallets and superball)

Performance Notes

Aside from the various instructions within the score, there are a variety of challenges that may be worth mentioning. Below are a few suggestions to consider when working through *Dystopia*.

Bowed instruments – You’ll notice several occasions for instruments to be bowed. This includes both vibraphones, the tam tam, and a waterphone. Ideally, larger bows (cello or bass) work best, and be sure to use rosin to provide ample friction.

Waterphone – The waterphone is a unique sound effect, often heard as a sound effect in film music. It’s made of a steel, bowl-shaped chamber, with a hollow neck tube that attaches to it. Around the perimeter of the chamber are metal tines which when bowed or struck, resonate in the chamber producing an other-worldly sound. Depending on how it’s played, the sound can be screechy, metallic, haunting, and even lyrical. A small amount of water may also be added inside which when gently swirled, causes the pitch to vary and bend. It’s a fascinating instrument, and I highly encourage you to find one for use in this piece as it creates an interesting focal point throughout. However, they are somewhat rare (though decent deals may be found on Ebay). If you can’t acquire a waterphone, experiment with bowing other unusual items such as oven grills, music stands, guitar strings, crotales, suspended cymbals, car springs, etc. The goal is to create eerie sound effects. Be creative!

Instrument stations – You’re free to set up this ensemble however best fits your scenario. There are cases where some players will have some very quick changes from one instrument to another. For instance, the chime player occasionally has to move very quickly between the bowed waterphone, and the chimes played with different mallets. Take this into consideration when setting things up so transitions can be made quickly without distraction.

Bass Drum – There are a few occasions where the player is called on to achieve a groaning sound by rubbing a super ball across the large head of the bass drum. If you’ve never done this before, it may take a little practice to learn how much pressure to apply. Once you have it though, it’s not too difficult. Use a small, solid rubber ball that has enough “tack” to give good friction against the head.

At rehearsal E, several things are going on, with the main goal to create a brief sense of spookiness. The glockenspiel player can drag both mallets across the bars at random to make a swirling type of sound. Other frequently used sounds such as bowed tam tam, bass drum groan, waterphone, random timpani glissandi, and chimes played with xylophone mallets are used while the piano briefly takes the melody. Vibraphone and marimba players will notice some rather dense parts here, but fear not. While these parts do require four mallets, they’re structured in a way so that shifting in the right and left hand should be quite simple. It’s dissonant, but fits in the hands rather easily. Once the players figure out the notes, the patterns should snap into place. Again, the goal is for a creepy, dissonant moment. So even though there’s logic to the written parts, it should *sound* uncomfortable.

At rehearsal F, the low drums and piano have a pointed melody with fast-acting interjections from the other drums and cymbals. Be sure the piano and timpani pitches aren’t masked by the unpitched drums becoming too loud. Also, the triplets in the marimbas and vibraphones should drive this phrase with intensity. Even though they should be secondary to the drum melody, if they become too soft, this phrase will lose momentum as it culminates to the climax of the piece. Snare and military drum statements should start very soft, and “burst” with each crescendo.

Dystopia isn’t typical, tonal music, nor is it necessarily standard percussion ensemble fare. Much of its effect will come as a result of creating mood and color, so being creative can help bring it to life. As mentioned in the program notes, this piece should take you on a journey. Try to tell your own story as you create the action required to communicate to the audience. Have a good, scary time with it!

Level: Med-Advanced
Duration: 4'00"

Written for the Lanier Middle School Percussion Ensemble, Buford, GA.

Dystopia

Jim Casella

Eerie, mysterious ♩ = 72

The musical score for "Dystopia" is written for a percussion ensemble and piano. The tempo is marked "Eerie, mysterious" with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two systems of staves.

First System:

- Glock:** Starts with a rest, then plays a melodic line starting at measure 11, marked *accel.* and *glock (med-soft plastic)*.
- Vibes 1:** Bowed, marked *f*. Starts at measure 11, marked *p* and *med mallets*.
- Vibes 2:** Bowed, marked *f*. Starts at measure 11, marked *p* and *med-soft mallets*.
- Marimba 1:** Soft mallets, marked *p*. Starts at measure 11, marked *pp*.
- Marimba 2:** Soft mallets, marked *p*. Starts at measure 11, marked *pp*.
- Timpani:** Starts at measure 11, marked *p*, then *mp* and *Spooky, soft glissandi rolls*.
- Piano:** Starts at measure 11, marked *mp*, then *p* and *cresc.*

Second System:

- Waterphone:** Bowed/random, marked *p*.
- Sus cym (w/mallets):** Starts at measure 11, marked *mp*.
- Bowed (random):** Starts at measure 11, marked *p*.
- Sizzle cymbal (softly w/mallet):** Starts at measure 11, marked *mp*.
- Using super ball, apply friction against bass head for groaning sound:** Starts at measure 11, marked *mp*.

Sample
Image

With determination ♯ = 168

Sample Image

22

G/X *mf*

V1 *f*

V2 *f*

M1 *mp*

M2 *mp*

Timp *f* hard mallets *E to E_b*

Pno *mp*

f *mp* *f* *mp*

f *mp*

(8) (10) (12)

sus cym (w/mallets) *p* *mf*

sizzle (l.v.) *mf* *p*

Sample
Image

31

G/X

V1

V2

M1

M2

Timp

Pno

Chime
Wphne

Perc

M Dr

SD

Tam

Toms

Cyms

BD

B

xylo

gliss.

f

temple blocks

quick pedaling

f

p

sfz

f

fz

mp

pp

mp

pp

2 cowbells

f

sus cym w/st

Sample
Image

52 G.P. **D**

glock (med-soft plastic)

mp *p*

V1 *mp* *p*

V2 *mp*

M1 *ff* *p* *ff*

M2 *ff* *p* *ff*

Timp *f* *p* Eb to E

Pno *mp* *p* (2)

Chime Wphne *p*

Perc *p* triangle, small CB, bell of sus cym, finger cym all played with triangle beaters Tri SC CB FC (2)

M Dr

SD *ff* crash

Tam *ff* scrape w/tri beater

Toms *mp* Sizzle Cymbal (softly w/mallet)

Cyms

BD *ff*

Sample
Image

The image displays a musical score for a percussion ensemble. The score is written on ten staves, each representing a different instrument. The instruments are identified by their names in the left margin: Snare, Tom, Bass, and Cymbal. The score includes various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *sfz* (sforzando), *f* (forte), and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. A large, stylized graphic of a hand holding a mallet is overlaid on the left side of the score, partially obscuring the staves. The text "Sample Image" is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font across the bottom of the image.

Sample Image

Sample Image

Sample Image

78 **F** With intensity

G/X xylo *f* *gliss*

V1 *ff*

V2 *ff*

M1 *ff* *f* (2)

M2 *ff* *f* (2)

Timp dampen *ff* F# to A *ff*

Pno (8) 8^{va} *ff*

Chime Wphne chimes (w/regular hammer) *f*

Perc dampen *ff*

M Dr (snare on) *pp* *f* *pp*

SD *pp* *f* strikes edge w/stick *f*

Tam dampen

Toms toms *ff*

Cyms *f*

BD dampen *ff* *f*

Sample
Image

97 **H** $\text{♩} = 72$ rit. Fade to nothing

G/X

V1 *ff* *f* bowed

V2 *ff* *f* bowed

M1 *ff* *f* *p* soft mallets

M2 *ff* *f* *p* soft mallets

Timp *f*

Pno *mp* *mp* *pp* 15th cluster at bottom of piano

Chime Wphne *ff* *p* crash waterphone (bowed)

Perc *ff*

M Dr

SD

Tam

Toms *ff*

Cyms

BD *ff* *pp*

Sample
Image